

## Fiction, Film, Painting, and Comparative Literature

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**Ramona L. Ceciu,**  
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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 15.6 (2013)**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "Fiction, Film, Painting, and Comparative Literature" Ramona L. Ceciu proposes a view of comparative literature as a "language in a process of ascertaining its proper grammar." She argues that like any language in order to survive, comparative literature must allow for a constant rejuvenation of its vocabulary and methods it must keep an "open" structure that would accommodate fresh extra-methodological approaches through a procedure of re-invention and expansion. Ceciu posits that in this process the comparatist's "objective creativity" plays a crucial role and draws on Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's concept of a "new comparative literature" and applies the concept to literature, painting, and film in India.

## Ramona L. CECIU

### Fiction, Film, Painting, and Comparative Literature

In many ways comparative literature is similar to a "language" created from other "languages" which functions as a sort of "methodological Esperanto." Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek posited that comparative literature as discipline is a "method in the study of literature" because it requires "knowledge of more than one national language and literature, "the application of other disciplines to the study of literature, and because it has "an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature ... a genre, other text types" (*Comparative Literature* 13). Comparison stands out as a *sine-qua-non* for any critical analysis, while comparative literature needs to expand its methodological purview so that it incorporates new methods of research pertaining to other disciplines. Since its beginnings as a discipline, comparative literature has been contested, always in some crisis or another either in terms of identity or in terms of methodology, scope, focus, language issues, and so on. Its birth was proclaimed in the nineteenth century, its death was proclaimed in recent times, its path has been wrought many times in various directions with countless obstacles and, yet, comparative literature has survived proving its endurance. From Adrian Marino's *nouveau paradigme*, Claudio Guillén's *crisis de las humanidades* and his position on the comparativist's sensitivity to tensions between the local and the universal or the complaint against the "politicization of the humanities" to Emily Apter's proposition of a discipline that is "open to historical change and Third World cultures," etc., all the ups and downs of literary (comparative) studies are amply evident. In the same context, César Domínguez for instance speaks about the global phenomena of "emergence" in humanities and posits that "literary emergence" is a "comparative problem" whose study requires an interdisciplinary focus: "the multi-dimensionality of literary work, emergent included, requires the application of theoretical and methodological frameworks employed in other disciplines in order to gain a balanced perspective ... which Darío Villanueva has defended as 'critical pluralism'" (<<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1304>>).

In a similar sense, I emphasize that comparative literature cannot live without a critical multi-perspectivism which needs to be rooted in interdisciplinarity not only in terms of its objects of investigation, but also in terms of methodology. I propose a view of comparative literature as a synonym for interdisciplinarity and an idea of comparative literature as a "language in a process of ascertaining its proper grammar" I argue that like any "language" in order to survive, comparative literature must allow for a constant rejuvenation of its vocabulary and methods and it must keep an open structure that would accommodate fresh extra-methodological approaches through a procedure of re-invention and expansion where the comparatist's "creativity" — although not so much emphasized by critics owing to a pejorative equation of "creativity" with "subjectivity" — plays a crucial role. I emphasize the importance of creativity understood as "objective creativity" in approaching a particular literature through methods of study specific for other disciplines. By objective creativity I mean primarily originality in objective thinking about the multiple possibilities in relating and analyzing the objects of concern from multiple critical perspectives both in terms of form-content-influences (intra- and extra-literary) and methods of inquiry, but also the "point" where this creativity is applied. I expand my proposition by looking at three different arts, namely literature, painting, and film through methods and examples belonging to all these arts by an analysis of the figure of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus I advance questions such as how can we expand the "vocabulary" and methodology of comparative literature? How can we "speak" the "language" of comparative literature by borrowing new concepts, "syntactical structures," and methods from other disciplines? Can we think about an "emergence" of comparative literature in contemporary India, an emergence where comparative literature stands at the fulcrum of inter-disciplinary research?

Methodology belongs mainly to the conscious sphere where topics, problems, areas, and methods of research are organized and accessed in a structured manner according to certain rules. But is that enough for the evolution of comparative literature? I submit that the true evolution happens in the conscious dimension when the change has already begun in the subconscious of the discipline and it may surface only when circumstances are propitious to its development. The

subconscious of comparative literature embodies in fact myriad spheres belonging to as many comparatist minds and possible comparative literary studies and approaches as there are at any given point in time in a particular (and in the global) cultural space. It is true that the form and contents of this subconscious are unquantifiable and "slippery," but if the underground and the roots fixated within it are not visible to us, the trunks of the trees surely can be perceived well enough and analyzed in order to render some idea about those roots. This metaphor gives an overall image of my idea of "creative thinking" and "objective creativity." Creativeness or creative thinking stands as an ability and power for creation and innovation, while "objective creativity" refers to "originality" in both perspective and objective thinking about the issues at hand. Objective creativity is premised on the existence and manifestation of the abilities of creating and innovating — the roots of trees — which reside in the subconscious and branch out into both pragmatic and theoretical output of the "researching mind." What methodology does is to train the trees of thought and objective creativity into tangible proposals and shapes similar to topiary or what Richard Reames calls arbor-sculpture. The coalescence between method and objective creativity, if successful, will always lead to effective methods of teaching the arts and new theories and surprising observations, but also to substantial contributions to the subjects of research in terms of approach, content, purpose, and the effects propagated in/around the disciplines involved, and further in society. Thierry de Duve has argued that "what hinders a new way of thinking about art teaching" is 'the myth of creativity and the myth of a visual language' and points to the necessity of having these terms 'historicized'" (42-43).

Although since his work in the 1990s, Tötösy de Zepetnek developed a new field designated as "comparative cultural studies" (see, e.g., "From Comparative" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1041>>, "The New"; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári), in his 1998 book *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application* he wrote about the role intuition plays in literary study and stressed that "what is of importance, rather, is the point of entry of intuition when analyzing what has been observed" (*Comparative Literature* 30). I add that intuition, as instinctive knowing, has a crucial function in interdisciplinarity itself, being closely related to creativity, while both intuition and creativity must find an outlet within the objective exposition of a research thesis. If these two factors pass ignored by the researcher and only methodology gives the shape of the work, then the final account may suffer. For instance, the researcher must manifest intuition and objective creativity chiefly in relation to the disciplines selected for investigation, the approaches and the "points of entry" and also in the ways in which the findings are "integrated" and presented as coherent thesis meant to advance knowledge. Joe Moran posited that "the value of the term, 'interdisciplinary,' lies in its flexibility and indeterminacy, and ... there are as many forms of interdisciplinarity as there are disciplines" (15). At the same time, "'interdisciplinarity' assumes the existence and relative resilience of disciplines as modes of thought and institutional practices" (Moran 17). This means that comparative literature has its specific interdisciplinarity that needs to work with and accommodate both in terms of "method" and "language." In interdisciplinary studies "integration" of the disciplines is essential not only bringing them together, but integrating them in a critical manner in a "transformative" way. Many scholars support the idea of interdisciplinary work, yet there are others, like Stanley Fish, Bill Readings, and Hal Foster, who generally disapprove of it and thus criticize interdisciplinarity's claim that it is "radical and innovative in its own right and can transcend the status of the university as an economic and cultural institution"; nevertheless, they foresee that interdisciplinary studies will become "the future of the university" (Moran 183; see also Le Juez <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss7/2>>).

This surely implies the necessity that before reaching interdisciplinary study one must first explore and get proficiency in at least one of the disciplines involved in that study similar to what Tötösy de Zepetnek suggested. At the same time, Readings emphasized that the disciplines must "answer to the name of Thought, to imagine what kinds of thinking they make possible, and what kinds of thinking they exclude" (Readings qtd. in Moran 187). In relation to this statement I add that this implies the ability of listening to one's intuition and applying it through objective creativity towards a logical elaboration of the argument keeping track of both its pros and cons. Eva Kushner argued that comparative literature as an "open system" where "openness guarantees that access to canonization will be truly global while its systematicity guarantees that all data will be treated with

equivalent criteria" and the inductive method of approach seems appropriate (<<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1096>>; on the systems approach see also Schmidt <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1569>>) and this view carries various ideas which Tötösy de Zepetnek elaborated when combining humanities approaches with scientific methods (*Comparative Literature*, see also "The New"; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári) and proposed a "new comparative literature" premised on "The Systemic and Empirical Approach to Literature and Culture" and outlined in his Manifesto not only its ten principles, but also its obstacles. He defined comparative literature as basically including "apart from the traditional and historical approach to 'compare' literary texts from different languages and cultures — the study of the literary text in/as its relationship with extra-literary areas (e.g., sociology, history, economics, the publishing industry ... geography, biology...) the other arts" (*Comparative Literature* 30). He pointed out that humanities need to adopt the methods, exactitude, replicability, and objectivity of the natural sciences and drew on concepts such as Siegfried J. Schmidt's *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft*, Pierre Bourdieu's *le champ littéraire*, Jacques Dubois's *l'institution littéraire*, Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, Niklas Luhmann's social systems approach, and Robert Estivals's *système de l'écrit*. In relation to these hypotheses Tötösy de Zepetnek wrote that these theories should be "understood collectively as systemic-institutional frameworks and methodologies for the study of literature — ... a similar range of phenomena considered as interrelated and therefore designated for description and interpretation (i.e., the whole field of 'literary life' or of 'the literary — socially interactive communication situation'), heuristic models indebted to semiotics and socio-semiotics, the sociology of literature, and communication theories, based in dynamic, operational, functional, and open (self-referential) system theories, and a strong preference for observation and verification instead of intuition, speculation, and metaphorical description" (*Comparative Literature* 25-29).

In consequence, Tötösy de Zepetnek argued that the researcher should focus more on the "how" of the study of literature than on the "what" question, that is, on the method in the study of literature, although he/she does not have to discard the close-reading of the texts and prompted the necessity of looking at how the literary system operates and the need of keeping "intuition" subservient to the process of methodical substantiation. Among many principles such as the dialogue between cultures, languages, and literatures, the necessary grounding that the comparatist must have in several languages and literatures he/she works with or the cultural context and the issues of globalization versus localization, Tötösy de Zepetnek emphasized two principles, namely the fourth ("the comparative principle") and the eighth ("the principle of method") which involve other disciplines: "The Fourth General Principle of Comparative Literature is its interest to study literature in relation to other forms of artistic expression (the visual arts, music, film, etc.) and in relation to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (history, sociology, psychology, etc.). ... The Eighth General Principle of Comparative Literature is its attention and insistence on methodology in interdisciplinary study (an umbrella term), with three main types of methodological precision: intra-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity and pluri-disciplinarity" (*Comparative Literature* 16-18). Further, in his analysis of cinema and literature, Tötösy de Zepetnek looked at the problematics of realism with specific focus on the adaptations of novels to films.

In his analysis of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and Faßbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Tötösy de Zepetnek employed the notions of "perception of realism," "impression of reality," "the intention of realism," and "the use of External Fields of References as indicators or manifestations of realism in the narrative" (*Comparative Literature* 100). The notion of "External Fields of Reference" was advanced initially by Benjamin Hrushovski to refer to all extra-literary elements of a text as opposed to the "Internal Field of Reference" and Tötösy de Zepetnek stressed that all these elements appear both in film and the literary text, but that they are employed differently and receive different emphasis from both writer and filmmaker. The personal histories of the two authors, their focus and interests, their choices of words, metaphors, and visual devices and scenes carried the narrative focus and the shaping of reality in different ways, while the perception of realism was given in both cases by the frames and fields of references (internal and external references). The audience understands these distinctions in various degrees according to their own knowledge about the film or literary references. With regard to response to these arts, Tötösy de

Zepetnek noted that some scholars who research audience response to film employ reader-response methodologies along with narratology and "make no differentiation between responses to literature (the written text) and film (a visual matter). Clearly, response to film will be different and predicated on different parameters than response to written material" (*Comparative Literature* 27). Drawing upon Erich Auerbach (*Mimesis*), Christian Metz (*Film Language*), and André Bazin (*What is Cinema?*) Tötösy de Zepetnek referred to the distinction between literary and cinematic realism: "the term and concept of realism is intrinsic in cinema and it is not in literature and its ubiquitous presence only proves that realism is one of several methods and thus, obviously, not all literature is realistic" (*Comparative Literature* 84).

In cinema the representation of reality is transmitted to mind through the eye, while literature is entirely an affair of the mind, and this makes the realism in cinema more "complicated." "Realism" in literature and film depends on the creativity of the authors (writer and director), as well as on the perception of the readers and audience. Tötösy de Zepetnek noted that without creativity a film may become "documentary" thus "in 'fictional' film and in literary text the focus is creativity" and that it is important to realize that "it is a model of reality that makes a literary text a realistic text" and that this represents one problem in the adaptation of a realistic text into a film (*Comparative Literature* 88, 95). A good example in this sense is Minelli's 1949 adaptation of *Madame Bovary*, specifically the scene where Emma and Charles take their meal. In the novel "meals" appears in plural and points to the idea of repetition, but in the film this repetition is not maintained because, "the film lacks the power of language to show habitual behavior" and "attributes of language must be suppressed in favor of plastic images" (*Comparative Literature* 95). To this point, Tötösy de Zepetnek includes another factor, namely the selection of the actors that plays a major role in the success of the adaptation. Nevertheless, I would like to add here that even more important than all these is the manner in which the director handles the time-space paradigm and his creative input in the narrative translation from writing to moving image.

A few relevant instances of screen adaptation in the Indian context were discussed by Moinak Biswas with reference to Tapan Sinha's *Hansulibanker Upakatha* (Tales from Hansulibank), based on Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's novel. He gave the account of the encounter between Bandopadhyay and Sinha with one of the real life characters of the novel, namely the transvestite Nasubala, which had made Sinha regret that in his film he rendered Nasubala a woman saying that this "indeed took away something from the content ... The paradoxical double register that we, spectators of the present, encounter in these adaptation films comes from the co-existence of an exploration of life in all its reality and a vindication of that reality rendered through novelistic discourse. This is the archival second life of the novel — it becomes more than representation at a lapse of time, lends reality to the world to which it once owed its origin. Taking away Nasubala's in-between identity is a denial of perspective, a betrayal of the realist ethic. But it is also the elimination of a specific human instance — a valuable datum in the storehouse Tarashankar's novel has become" (Sinha qtd. in Biswas <[http://www.jmionline.org/film\\_journal/jmi\\_10/article\\_08.php](http://www.jmionline.org/film_journal/jmi_10/article_08.php)>). In this context, Biswas identified in Bengali cinema an "institutional crisis" along with a lack of skill and talent of co-actors and lack of technical proficiency in the "industry" from around mid-1980s. At the same time, the writers and artists of Bengal had to take a position *vis-à-vis* the social and political events of those times, and each position and individuality determined the features of the artist's creative output.

A second problem emerges when adapting "interior monologues" because in literature the interior monologue is intrinsic to the text, but "the filmic representation of such a narrative becomes another film" that is showing the monologue "involving the 'travel' of the mind in physical reality" disrupts the "novelistic unit" (Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature* 96-97). These problems of adaptation are for Tötösy de Zepetnek "larger than 'codes'" and he concluded that "If the realistic text is constructed of models of reality via simulation of reality, the adaptation of a realist text is "simulation" twice removed from reality. This is in addition to the inherent reality construct of the film, that is, its physical visuality. In another sense however, the adaptation of the realist text rests on the assumption that the realist text is reality" (*Comparative Literature* 98) and precisely in this "area" Tötösy de Zepetnek located the problem of adaptation of the realist text into film. However, I argue that first the notion of "realism" must be thoroughly questioned and that



second Tötösy de Zepetnek's analysis centered on film adaptations while he mentioned photography's relation with cinema only rarely (e.g., when referring to André Bazin's theory of cinematic and photographic realism). Even so, Tötösy de Zepetnek's study of film and literature serves as a perfect example for similar applications to other disciplines or art forms. Comparative analysis may be applied to literature and other arts based on "drives" other than the adaptation. I am thinking here of painting, drawing or cover illustrations, for instance.

The general criticism brought against comparative inquiries involving visual arts and literature hovers over the scope of such studies and the specificity of the terms of identification/description for each field. For instance questions such as, is speaking of the rhythm of a poem same with speaking of the rhythm of a film or of a melody? Mary Gaither, while reminding us of such problems of investigations, points to three primary types of approaches which may give value and validity to comparisons. These approaches focus on relationship of form and content, influence and synthesis all meant to unravel cultural patterns, problems of language, styles, new interpretations of texts and arts, and so on. Gaither stated that "a greater responsibility for the right choice of subject devolves upon the painter than on the poet" and the artist should choose 'the most pregnant moment' of action to portray.' Nevertheless, with the stream-of-consciousness technique and all modern writing, the "spatial perception in creating a new narrative form" has become common in literature (156-57; see also Finger who designates the study of the other arts in comparative literature as "interart studies"). In sum, the concepts of one art may not simply be relocated into another artistic medium, but they must surely be re-worked according to the conventions specific for each particular art form. As Gaither stresses, "the serious artist and critic are ever-conscious of the "natural affinities" that exist between art and literature, and almost without exception allow these affinities themselves to suggest the parallels, the influences, the borrowings that become the basis for comparative analysis" (169). Beyond this, the researcher must employ his/her "creative objectivity" to build up a new level of critical inquiry and exposition. It is here where the subconscious of the comparative literature becomes significant and needs to be allowed to manifest its unconscious correlations into the conscious sphere, even though such correlations may initially seem groundless or even absurd. Only further objective investigation will decide if such correlations constitute valid points or not, but first they must be given the chance to enter the researcher's cognition and attention span.

Keeping in mind the views of Tötösy de Zepetnek, Biswas, and others, I turn now to the comparative study of literary-visual-moving images framework and focus on a real life character and historical figure, that of Gandhi by way of illustrating my points. I analyze Gandhi through linguistic and psychological devices as represented across three art forms. For this, I refer to Sudhir Kakar's 2004 novel *Mira and Mahatma*, Richard Attenborough's 1982 film *Gandhi*, and a few representations of Gandhi as depicted in the medium of painting. I explore how the filmmaker, the painters, and the psychologist-novelist approach and depict Gandhi in the languages of their distinct art media. Another pertinent point of my inquiry is how much of Gandhi is fictional and how much is factual? Are the accounts of him genuine facts or are they fused with certain fictional coatings applied by artist-intellectuals? Gandhi had as many identities as viewed from all perspectives of analysis plus maybe some identities which cannot be known by anyone. What we mostly hear about are his identities as "Mahatma," "Bapu," "father of the Nation," journalist or "freedom fighter," that is, chiefly his political, historical, social, and cultural identities. Probably few or no researchers have approached Gandhi from, let us say, fields of biology or medicine. In these approaches one might develop an intriguing analysis of the physical ordeals and body/mind modifications he suffered during his prolonged fasts and low food intake, their possible impacts on his psychology and brain functions, etc. His fasting has been generally analyzed as a political tool and few adopted the psychoanalytic approach to Gandhi such as Sudhir Kakar in his work. The Gandhi Museum has archived 137 films mainly in English and Hindi, with few Gujarati, Marathi, and Urdu films related to Gandhi. This means there are about 137 filmic perspectives on Gandhi, plus innumerable literary accounts and painting works in which Gandhi is at the fulcrum of imagery. One cannot deny that probably all these artistic depictions of Gandhi carry seeds of truth to different degrees, but surely most of them rely heavily on imagination and fictitious elements. Various perspectives on Gandhi have stirred controversy and riots, as it happened for instance with Kamal

Haasan's 2000 *Hey Ram* dealing with the Partition moments and the murder of Gandhi by a Hindu extremist, Nathuram Godse.

The 1982 film *Gandhi* is an interesting attempt at rendering the great life of an illustrious person: "No man's life can be encompassed in one telling. There is no way to give each year its allotted weight, to include each event, each person who helped to shape a lifetime. What can be done is to be faithful in spirit to the record and try to find one's way to the heart of the man." This quote from the film means much if read in terms of visual adaptations of any literary account or any historical character's life. Ten adaptations of the same novel will always have ten angles of approach and possibly ten different sets of events selected and presented to the viewers in distinct fashion — as per director's vision, script-writer's creative input, skill of actors, space-time coordinates and many other factors. Among other factors, the filmic language and the manner in which the psychological functions of the diegetic world affect the viewer largely ensure the success or failure of the film. This film evokes Gandhi (played by Ben Kingsley, born Krishna Bhanji his paternal family coming from Gujarat) as the social and political activist, the reformist, journalist and freedom fighter, while in *Mira and Mahatma* Kakar explores the more personal identities of Gandhi — chiefly Gandhi as man, as husband, as friend, and leader. Kakar surprises Gandhi in some intense moments characterizing his social relationships with women and men in various insignificant moments of daily life when in fact multiple psychological issues, principles and values come to the surface of consciousness and get reflected in small gestures and actions. Similarly, painters like Nandalal Bose, Gopal Swami Khetanchi, Diptish Ghosh Dastidar, and many others explore on their canvases a variety of takes and contexts involving Gandhi as a public figure and icon of an Indian collective consciousness. Even if most visual and literary narratives bear certain iconic similarities in depicting the Gandhi persona, surely the psychologist, the fiction writer, the painter and the filmmaker will always search in Gandhi for different *Gandhi*-s.



Gopal Swami Khetanchi, *In Search of Truth*  
Copyright release to the author.



Gopal Swami Khetanchi, *Gandhigiri*  
Copyright release to the author.

As curators Bahl Sushma and Archana Bahl Sapra noted, painter Gopal Swami Khetanchi contrasts "shining India and whining Bharat" in a series of about twenty oil paintings created on Gandhi. Sushma Bahl (with inputs from Archana B. Sapra) explained the artist's method of approach and the visual theme: "The exhibits speak for opening of doors and inclusion of the deprived and marginalized in our collective mind frame and official policy making process as espoused by the Mahatma over six decades earlier, in an attempt to rid society of prevalent divisiveness. ... A period of thinking and meditation is followed by research and, in this case, readings on Gandhi and his ideology. The compositions are first planned on computer using photoshop. Then he begins to translate the idea by drawing and sketching and painting the imagery on the canvas, initially with pencil, then 2 or 3 layers of oil colour to bring out the bold parts with others sections in the background" (see Bahl and Sapra n.p.). All these depictions have in common the iconic looks of an elderly Gandhi, the classic symbols of his persona — the father figure with round spectacles,



dropping eyes, a humble smile, thin body, clad in a white dhoti and so on. The rest of the elements and figures populating the canvases create other discourses complementing or countering the main discourse through an intriguing method of translating the conceptual into the visual.



Diptish Ghosh Dastidar, *Gandhi and Charkha*. Copyright release to the author.

Dastidar can be counted among the very few artists who look at Gandhi from an uncommon angle. In his alternative perspective, Diptish surprises Gandhi and his spinning wheel like an "underground voyeur" and makes the viewer feel the weight of the "figure" and of the "principles" embodied by him. From his *Autobiography* we know that for Gandhi the moments of spinning were also moments of reflection, meditation on the problems he and his nation were experiencing in those times of anti-colonial struggle. Diptish approaches Gandhi in the intimacy of such moments as unusually and furtively as Kakar probes into his psyche. The two crows — where one got the piece of meat while the other just looks at the lost morsel — symbolize the Partition of the country, the border which people struggle to cross from one side to another, the sectioned selves and the hunger that the Partition entailed for so many people, as well as the ultimate failure of the Gandhian project. Khetanchi's painting titled *Gender Bender* replays the "legend" and depicts the idea of womanhood and women as part of Gandhi's mental and social preoccupations, while his canvas titled *In Search of Truth* and his *Gandhi-giri* fiberglass sculpture render the almost archetypal image of the activist "Father" and the wise thinker. *Gandhi-giri* is a term coined by the Hindi motion picture *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006), broadly referring to "those practicing Gandhian rules," a sort of *Gadhi-ism*, but with pejorative and sarcastic tones. Such associations demonstrate the multiple possibilities of interpreting and circulating notions belonging to the sphere of popular culture and lexicon in inter-textual patterns and conceptual embodiments specific for different media and artistic idioms. Further, the painting titled *Gender Bender* shows the evolution of the common Indian woman from a sad childhood to a troubled adult life when work is indispensable for the need of survival. The iconicity of Gandhi begs in this case comparison with the iconicity of the women working on the construction sites — hammer in hand, body covered by dust, breaking stone after stone, maybe for the building of a rich people's mansion or public offices; heavy load of work for a few Rupees and a mouthful of food. By the depiction of all the signifiers of what Gandhi symbolized and what he achieved, the painter avoids showing the reverse side of what had ultimately "failed" — the condition of women and that of the untouchables has not improved much in the long run, the mind-set regarding the physical labor remained more or less unchanged and confined to the same lower social strata. Or the representation shows a too effusive text which means it equally hides multiple meanings within the textual interspaces.



Gopal Swami Khetanchi, *Gender Bender*. Copyright release to the author.

Kakar's novel represents in itself a research thesis combined with fictional elements, because Kakar undertook a fair investigation concerning the relationship Gandhi had with Madeleine Slade alias Mirabehn over a period of about seven years (from 1925 to 1930 and 1940 to 1942). He based his novel on multiple true events and covered, through the device of fictitious letters and diaries, a great part of Mahatma's life, his interactions with other people and historical events that marked his times and life. In Kakar's novel the relation between Mira and Kasturba Gandhi is fret with tensions and silent clashes — that is, mostly ingrained in their body language, their exchange of glances, attitudes and at times words. Attenborough in the film gives Kasturba a more active role in Gandhi's life and makes Mira a very silent presence. At the same time he portrays the two characters in a pacifist light, as friends and close family of Gandhi. In contrast, Kakar — while carefully delving into the psyche of each character — unravels the silent hostility and "jealousy" between the two women who constantly craved for the attention and small slices of time Gandhi could offer them from his busy schedule. While the literary text depicts such things in words and allows the reader to imagine and interpret whatever it is depicted, each figurative painting shapes a coherent narrative in a single "static" frame, in a language that communicates through symbols, colors, perspectives, figure's body language, facial expressions and so on. The film unfolds in front of the audience during a longer period of time through a series of moving images and "frames"—shots and sequences. These slide within the main static frame (the screen) at a speed which does not allow the audience to analyze every sequence or frame composition and imprint in each reader's mind just a general story flow. But the researcher must freeze in mind and analyze the stills of a film in order to get the detailed meanings of the composition and to be able to contrast them with the paintings relevant for the comparison.

Kakar notes that Kasturba had become used to seeing many women in Gandhi's life: "the women came charged with feelings that spanned the whole range from a silent dog-like devotion to a florid and demanding infatuation, "but with Mira it was different because "the Englishwoman had intruded into a space that had never been violated by any other woman before her. Ba's cooking and serving his meals, the massage of his feet ... were but the outer manifestations of the intermediary space between body and mind that the couple inhabited together. To Ba, these were not just traditional ways of serving her husband but the medium of a vital exchange between Bapu and her, the play of countless subtle antennae seeking one another. Mira had severed this vital connection" (Kakar 126). At an opposite pole, the filmmaker — probably attempting to keep a pacifistic image in correspondence with Gandhian ideology — brings the two women close in their "cooperation" towards Gandhi's well being. Unlike the novelist, the film director pushes this relation to the extreme where Mira spends many moments near Kasturba's bed in her last days of life — almost as an extension or even a "supplement" of Gandhi.

Gandhi employed his corporeal self as a weapon against anything he deemed as injustice in the behavior of his fellow Indians. Whenever any religious group committed violence against others, he

would fast. But his bodily sacrifice was not taken seriously or was not properly understood by everyone. As Madeleine had discovered herself, in the ashram "the faith in Gandhi's vision varied from the frank skepticism of most women who longed to be back in the web of family life in their villages and towns, savoring its small pleasures and sharing its travails, to the fanaticism of a few men who pushed the ideal of simplicity to extremes of ascetism" and it was the "visionary" not the vision that drew these men there (*Mira* 43). Most women in the ashram had come with their children because their husbands wanted to join Gandhi, not out of their own 'will'. Though many people used to have disputes, jealous and envious reactions towards each other, Gandhi always "focused on what he knew they could become" (*Mira* 42).

Attenborough's film takes one position in relation to each event narrated about Gandhi's life and, in its own visual language, introduces fictitious elements and employs a particular selection of incidents which the director handles in his own fashion — i.e., the film starts with the assassination, then it goes back in time when young Gandhi is thrown out of the train in Africa, etc. Another illustration of directorial intervention is when Madeleine Slade appears in the film from the start with the name of "Mirabehn" without any indication about the manner in which Madeleine had come into the "possession" of an Indian name. Probably the director — owing to the necessary selection of the important sequences of Gandhi's life which could give weight and fit within the length of the film — considered that such mention was not particularly important. On the other hand, explaining the change of the name would have pushed the filmic text towards the citation of Mirabai's myth. That, at one level, would have been difficult to handle in the moving images, while at another level, would have deviated the main thread of the film — namely the social and activist input of Gandhi in the Indian history and his imprint in the world consciousness. However, Kakar's detailed analysis of the "ritual" that led to Madeleine's Indian "identity" and the mythical connections bear a role in the subliminal space of the textual self. Akin to the corporeal sacrifice of Gandhi, the sacrifice of Madeleine's "English identity" is both desirable and necessary for the evolution of her own self. Fasting and the sacrifice of his own body were meant to ignite awareness in people about the effects of their own actions on others and by this act — along with other similar and iconic gestures, like *khadi*, *charkha*, and others — Gandhi acquired new self identities and eternal visual identities. All these actions demanded awareness, determination, and constant effort. Similarly, Madeleine becomes Mira only after she undergoes certain physical (cutting her hair, dressing like an Indian woman etc.) and "mental" changes. Kakar emphasizes subtly the two versions of Madeleine throughout the book in terms of language. For any mention of past incidents Kakar uses the past tense along with the name "Madeleine" while all events taking place after her closeness to Gandhi and after the ritual of her initiation in the Indian culture, appear in the present tense along with the name of "Mira" or "Mirabehn." Yet this identity surgery appears superficial because the actual Self of Madeleine is "something else." However, the film does not capture these subtleties, not because the film language cannot accommodate them, but because the filmmaker's purpose was largely different to the psychologist-novelist's interest.

Do paintings, films, and literary depictions need history or does history need such artistic records? A possible answer is embedded in Rebecca Gould's "The Geography of Comparative Literature" where she criticizes the disciplinary divide between literature and history as institutionalized disciplines in Western and Non-Western academic world, focusing on the empirical engagements of comparative literature in contrast to history, as the fictional versus the factual. Gould calls for a "decolonizing literary comparativism through non-European archives" stating that: "More than any other discipline, comparative literature is called on to assume a medial position between national literatures — which in the non-western context are taxonomied in terms of area studies — and conceptual history ... By combining area studies with history while remaining faithful to the discursive autonomy of the literary artifact, comparative literature can induce conceptual and empirical change" (183). Gould prescribes this move towards conceptual and empirical change by emphasizing the need to merge the fictional and the factual, that is, the literary/artistic perspective must be grounded in and combined with the historical and social perspectives. Of course, the concepts of history and historical "truth" or how much it is "factual" or "fictional" pose innumerable problems. However, one can derive from here the idea that the historian, the psychologist, the artist, and the writer must engage in dialogue, exchange tools of inquiry and views on the topic at

hand in order to augment the richness of the textual selves they create in terms of perspectives, meanings, exposition, style, and language. Their texts must grow creative roots drawing from extensive "fields of reference" including the history and society with which the texts are concerned. Similarly the researcher must premise his/her work on scientific inquiries and humanities altogether, mix objective creativity with empirical observation in a critical framework that will unravel new and "original" findings. From psychological and linguistic concepts, cognitive structures, visual metaphors, methods of "reading the reality" and translating it into fictional and critical expositions, one can explore innumerable avenues of research.

In conclusion, comparative literature cannot restrict itself, as is so often the case, to only two disciplines at one time — e.g., literature and cinema — and in the latter case it must not remain stuck only on the classical relation between literary text and its filmic adaptation. In keeping with the trends expounded in critical theory, it is evident that comparative literature possesses the greatest potential among all disciplines to incorporate new methods and discover the "unexplored." The subconscious of comparative literature abounds with myriad possibilities and connections waiting to be unraveled. In India, this discipline probably has even greater scope and interest in expanding owing to the linguistic treasures and cultural diversity which characterize its geographical and historical space. Contemporary times call for a renewal of comparative literary studies in the languages and cultures of India and this can be best done with interdisciplinarity. However, it depends on the new generations of researchers to stand up in support of such an enterprise and go beyond rigid patterns of thought which only act as a deterrent to the development of new and exciting perspectives resulting in incisive scholarship.

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